Unit .35

Session .01

Preaching in All Circumstances

Scripture

Acts 24:1-9; 25:9-12; 26:27-32

1 Five days later Ananias the high priest came down with some elders and a lawyer named Tertullus. These men presented their case against Paul to the governor. **2** When Paul was called in, Tertullus began to accuse him and said, "We enjoy great peace because of you, and reforms are taking place for the benefit of this nation because of your foresight. **3** We acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with utmost gratitude. **4** But, so that I will not burden you any further, I request that you would be kind enough to give us a brief hearing. **5** For we have found this man to be a plague, an agitator among all the Jews throughout the Roman world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. **6[a]** He even tried to desecrate the temple, and so we apprehended him. By examining him yourself you will be able to discern the truth about these charges we are bringing against him." **9** The Jews also joined in the attack, alleging that these things were true ... **9** But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, replied to Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem to be tried before me there on these charges?" **10** Paul replied, "I am standing at Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as even you yourself know very well. **11** If then I did anything wrong and am deserving of death, I am not trying to escape death; but if there is nothing to what these men accuse me of, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar!" **12** Then after Festus conferred with his council, he replied, "You have appealed to Caesar; to Caesar you will go." ... **27** King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you believe." **28** Agrippa said to Paul, "Are you going to persuade me to become a Christian so easily?" **29** "I wish before God," replied Paul, "that whether easily or with difficulty, not only you but all who listen to me today might become as I am—except for these chains."**30** The king, the governor, Bernice,and those sitting with them got up, **31** and when they had left they talked with each other and said, "This man is not doing anything to deserve death or imprisonment." **32** Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar."

a. Some manuscripts include vv. 6b-8a: and wanted to judge him according to our law. 7 But Lysias the commander came and took him from our hands with great force, 8 commanding his accusers to come to you.

Intro Options

Main Point:
Live for Christ wherever God's providence places you.

Option 1

Your students should pretend they work for an English as a second language company, making aids to help people learn to speak English. Have them get into small groups and assign each group one of the words below. Their job is to create an artistic aid to help ESL learners get familiar with that word. They could make a short skit, do a drawing, or create a short rhyme using the following simple words.

- Random
- Order
- Chaos
- Guide
- Disorder
- Control

Let them prepare and share their artistic aids. Afterward, discuss what similarities they saw for words like order, control, and guide. What similarities did they see for disorder, chaos, and random?

In today's session, we'll see that God is always in control of our circumstances, even when it may look like they are in disorder or random. God's people should trust His providence and use their circumstances as an opportunity to preach Jesus to those around us.

Option 2

In small groups, your students should come up with an idea to advertise one of the following phrases:

- It is what it is.
- Things are the way they are.
- Wherever you go, there you are.

Note that these phrases are meant to be bland; your students probably will have a hard time making anything exciting out of them. Let them prepare and show their ads, pictures, etc.

Now have them repeat the exercise, but with the phrases altered as follows:

- It is what it is because it's His.
- Things are the way God has ordained them to be.
- Where you go, God guides you there.

Point out that people often spout platitudes like the first trio, but those phrases typically hold no meaning. On the other hand, as we'll see in the session today, the last three are truisms on which all Christians can depend. Such truths prompt us to redeem the time to love God and to love people.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Acts 24:1-9.

The prophet Agabus foretold that the Jews would deliver Paul over to Gentile rulers (vv. 10-11). His ominous words had been unfolding since Paul arrived in Jerusalem, and here, they are fulfilled. The high priest and Jewish elders used a lawyer to present their case against Paul before Felix, a Roman governor. They knew their accusations were false, so they resorted to flattery and exaggeration.

- **What were their accusations against Paul?**

They called Paul an agitator, accusing him of stirring up Jews throughout the Roman empire. They also called him a "ringleader" of Christians and labeled him as a "plague" to society. Of course, he was a leader among Christians, but there was nothing illegal about being a religious leader. The real injustice was that they blamed him for the violence and unrest that Jews stirred up everywhere Paul went. Jewish leaders throughout the Roman world, and in Jerusalem in particular, caused riots and agitated violence against Paul.

- **How might Jesus' teachings in passages like Matthew 10:16-19 have prepared the apostles for hostile, frightening moments like these?**

Agabus had prophesied that this would happen to Paul, and Jesus Himself appeared to Paul to remind him that Paul would testify of Him in Rome. But Jesus also said many things in His life and ministry to prepare all of His followers for this type of persecution. Although they were innocent, they were being sent into a world of wolves that would falsely accuse and prosecute them. He told his followers a few verses later that they would be mistreated and falsely accused just as He was (Matt. 10:24-25). When you expect to be treated as Jesus and the apostles were, you will be better prepared to face difficult circumstances with faith.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 40, DDG)

30. God's Providence

Providence refers to God's continuing work and involvement in His creation. This includes, in various degrees, God's preservation of the created order, His governance, and His care for His people (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; Gen. 8:21-22). Christians believe the world, and even the cosmos itself, is contingent upon God, incapable of existing apart from Him. Christians also believe in God's personal and direct intervention in the world—as opposed to a hands-off approach to creation—that affects not only the natural order, but also the individuals and events within human history.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Live for Christ wherever God's providence places you.

Acts 24:1-9

"It was common practice to employ a professional orator to present one's case before any 1st-century court. Form often carried more weight in these presentations than fact—something suggested in Tertullus' complementary opening remarks (vv. 2–3). These are stunning, in view of the fact that contemporaries describe Felix's time in office as marked by great cruelty, total disregard of his subjects' rights, and greed."[1]

"This is the point this whole passage is making for us. We see Paul now going ahead, bound as a prisoner, yet finding, nevertheless, that the fullness of God's power and glory is able to work in him just as freely through the channel of imprisonment as it did when he was free. The imprisonment was not comfortable. It added a good deal of agony and heartache to the apostle's own experience. But he accepted it as God's provision for him, and found it to be no less the instrument of God's working and power than anything else he had experienced before."[2]

"The charge is similar to that brought against Paul and his companions at Thessalonica (17:6-7). 9 The charge of treason against the emperor was explicit there, and is probably implicit here."[3]

"This is the only place in the New Testament where the term "Nazarene"—or "Nazoraean," as the particular Greek word here used may be more exactly rendered -—is used of the followers of Jesus; elsewhere it is used only of Jesus himself. The most probable view is that it was first applied to Jesus because his hometown was Nazareth, and that from him it came to be used of his followers also."[4]

1. Lawrence O. Richards, Bible Reader's Companion (David C. Cook, 2002).
2. Ray C. Stedman, "Discipline of Delay," RayStedman.org, March 7, 1971, https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/acts/discipline-of-delay.
3. F.F. Bruce, New International Commentary
4. Ibid.

In Defense (p. 42, DDG)

Agrippa believed the prophets (Acts 26:27), so Paul tried to demonstrate how the prophets predicted the death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 26:22-23). Many people believe in the concept of human equality, so we may try to win them by showing that Adamic ancestry, the image of God, and the gospel offer the most stable foundations for such a belief. Society's widespread belief in the concepts of justice, love, reason, etc. are great opportunities to demonstrate the truthfulness of Christianity. If we can take what people already believe and show how Christianity provides the best foundation or reason for such a belief, it can be a powerful apologetic.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Acts 25:9-12.

Two years had passed since Paul's original hearing before Felix. Felix had left him in prison as a favor to the Jews, but now in Acts 25, Felix was replaced by Festus. Again, the Jews brought many accusations before Festus that could not be proven (25:7). But when Festus offered to appease the Jews by letting them try Paul themselves in Jerusalem, Paul appealed to Caesar.

- **What stands out to you about Paul's defense?**

Festus wanted the Jews' approval, so he planned to turn Paul over to them to the Jews. This was essentially a death sentence for Paul because the Jews were seeking to murder him. But first, Festus gave Paul the opportunity to speak to the matter. Paul's response demonstrated that his innocence was self-evident to all. It also showed that his main concern was not saving his own life—Paul was not afraid to die—but fulfilling his God-given purpose. So, Paul appealed to justice, since he'd done nothing deserving of death, and to Caesar, because Christ sent Him to Rome.

- **What can we learn from Paul's defense?**

First, Paul's defense reminds us that we should live in a way that is above reproach. The accusations against Paul were plainly false. May the same be said of us. Second, we should not fear death. Paul was originally on trial because he was teaching the resurrection (Acts 23:6). It would be unfitting for those who preach the hope of resurrection to fear death. The resurrection should make us brave. Finally, we should seek justice. God is a just Judge, and His people should appeal to what is just both for ourselves and for others. Paul insisted that handing him over to the Jews would be unjust, and the Roman authorities had an obligation to protect one of their citizens against an obvious injustice.

Read Acts 26:27-32.

King Agrippa visited Festus, and when Festus told him about Paul's trial, Agrippa wanted to hear from Paul himself. Agrippa was familiar with the Jewish Scriptures and Jewish issues of his day, so Paul was able to defend both himself and the gospel knowing that Agrippa would understand. This emboldened Paul to "swing for the fences" with his gospel presentation.

- **What did Paul mean when he said that he wished all of them "might become as I am – except for these chains" (26:29)?**

When Agrippa asked if Paul was trying to persuade him to become a Christian, Paul replied by saying he he desired for all of them to become Christians. Though he knew his purpose was to share Christ in Rome, Paul did not waste the opportunity to share Jesus right where He was. God calls us to share Jesus everywhere, with everyone, and in every season.

- **How can you share Jesus right where you are?**

We can miss opportunities when we look too far ahead. Remember that God's providence is found not only in the destination, but in the journey. Don't wait to live for Christ until you get where you are going in life (whatever that may look like for you); serve Him in each season. There are people in your life who God wants you to serve, love, and share the gospel with. Steward those opportunities in each season of life.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Live for Christ wherever God's providence places you.

Acts 25:9-12

"Paul knew that he would have no hope if surrendered to Jewish jurisdiction. It was only under a Roman tribunal that he could hope for any shred of justice. Now that the procurator appeared to be on the verge of handing him over to the Jews, he resorted to the only avenue left to assure his continuance under Roman jurisdiction—he made use of his citizen-right of appeal to Caesar."[5]

"Paul's appeal to Caesar is known as the provocatio, an appeal of a citizen for Caesar's judgment before a judgment has been rendered…This type of appeal is one of the oldest Roman ancient rights, dating back to 509 B.C."[6]

"The scene is important because it explains how Paul ultimately heads for Rome."[7]

Acts 26:27-32

"This is the second passage in the Acts (see ch. 11:26), in which the name Christian occurs; it is here contemptuously pronounced by one who is not a Christian."[8]

"He is infinite in wisdom as well as in power: And all his wisdom is continually employed in managing all the affairs of his creation for the good of all his creatures. For his wisdom and goodness go hand in hand: They are inseparably united, and continually act in concert with Almighty power, for the real good of all his creatures."[9]

Activity

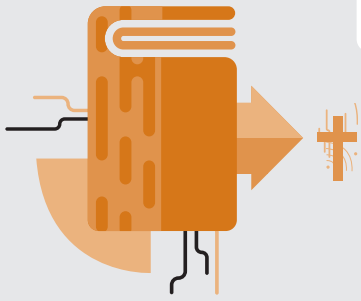
Break into small groups and assign each group one of the following titles: good, bad, or neutral. Each group should then create a situation fitting their title; for instance, the "good" groups might make a scenario involving going to a theme park or concert; the "bad" groups might make a scenario involving a break-up or getting caught cheating on a quiz; the "neutral" groups might make a normal lunch in the school cafeteria.

Remind them that the lesson today showed that God guides us into every circumstance, and that we are to preach him in every circumstance. Each group should now put on a short skit showing what it would look like to redeem their scenario. How can they preach Jesus in good, bad, or neutral circumstances?

5. Polhill, Acts, 6. Bock, Acts, 7. Ibid.
8. J.P. Lange et al., A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Acts (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008).
9. John Wesley, Sermons, on Several Occasions (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999).

(p. 41, DDG) Christ Connection

God had told Paul that he would preach before kings and that he would reach Rome. God's chosen path for Paul to fulfill these promises was in chains as a prisoner for His faith. Paul's trust in God and his continuing to preach the gospel in the face of false accusations, unjust sentencing, and possible torture and death is an example of confidence in the power of the gospel to save.



PREACHING IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

Acts 24:1-9, 25:1-12, 26:27-32

PREACHING IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

Live for Christ wherever God's providence places you.

JESUS CONNECTION

God told Paul that he would preach before kings and that he would reach Rome. God's chosen path placed Paul in chains as a prisoner for His faith. Paul trusted in the power of the gospel to save, continuing to preach the gospel in the face of false accusations, unjust sentencing and possible torture and death.

LIFEWISE QUALITY

PATIENCE – Being willing to wait.

HEAD

What did the Jewish leaders accuse Paul of?

How did Paul respond to their accusations?

HEART

Jesus chose Paul to take the good news of the gospel to the Israelites, Gentiles and kings (Acts 9:15). And over many years, God arranged for Paul to speak to all of those people about Jesus. How might remembering that God also has a good and perfect plan for you help you to live with patience?

Paul was imprisoned for at least three years in Caesarea. He waited patiently for his trial, and he kept sharing his faith in Jesus with everyone he met. How can you keep living God's way as you wait patiently for God to work?

HANDS

When things aren't going as we'd wished, we may be tempted to take matters into our own hands. We try to hurry a response from parents, a coach or teacher, or our friend. We may even resort to doing wrong to get even or to get out of the situation. But the Bible instructs us to wait for God. For each of the verses below, write down what we are to wait for and why. Ask God to help you wait patiently for Him.

- Psalms 27:13–14 – I am certain that I will see the Lord's goodness in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart be courageous. Wait for the Lord.

- Proverbs 20:22 – Don't say, "I will avenge this evil!" Wait on the Lord, and He will rescue you.

- Romans 8:25 – Now if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience.

- Titus 2:11–13 – For the grace of God as appeared, bringing salvation for all people, instructing us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live in a sensible, righteous and godly way in the present age, while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.